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# CAMBRIDGEPORT

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## NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY



A JOINT REPORT OF THE

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CAMBRIDGEPORT NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY COMMITTEE AND

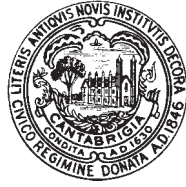
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THE CAMBRIDGE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

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# CAMBRIDGEPORT

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## NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY

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**Published May, 2000**

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Susanne Rasmussen, Director of Environmental and  
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The Cambridgeport Neighborhood Study Committee and the Community Development Department would like to thank all the Cambridgeport residents who participated in the public forums and committee meetings.

We would also like to thank the Cambridge School Department for allowing us to hold meetings at the Graham & Parks School and also thank Deborah Lerme-Goodman of the Graham & Parks Community School for her assistance.

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# *Executive Summary*

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The Cambridgeport Neighborhood Study Committee met for 24 months from February 1997 to January 1999. During this time the Study Committee heard presentations from city staff and other invited guests, debated issues, held large public forums and made recommendations to better the neighborhood. They discussed the issues of housing, economic development, land use and zoning, urban design, transportation and open space in the neighborhood. The Study Committee discussed their opinions and beliefs about neighborhood issues and, as a committee, created a set of goals and priorities for their neighborhood.

The Cambridgeport Neighborhood Study process also incorporated a series of large neighborhood forums to help facilitate the dialogue between the Study Committee and the community. These forums served two purposes:

1. to inform the community as to the direction and intent of the Study Committee and what their preliminary recommendations were going to be; and
2. to get feedback from the community as to the appropriateness and validity of the recommendations being put forth by the Study Committee.

Through this process the Study Committee developed recommendations to help their neighborhood become a more enjoyable place. Development pressures, traffic concerns, and open space issues were all topics that the Study Committee addressed in these recommendations.

The recommendations are as follows:

## **Cambridgeport Study Recommendations**

### ***Housing Recommendations***

1. The city should require that all large-scale residential and mixed-use developments in Cambridgeport, similar to 680 Memorial Drive (Polaroid site) and 664 Massachusetts Avenue (Holmes site), provide at least 25% of their units as affordable. These affordable units should be for a mixture of low-income and moderate-income tenants. In recognition of the fact that trade-offs may be necessary for developers to offset the cost of affordable units, the Study Committee would support density bonuses. *During the neighborhood study process the Cambridge Planning Board recommended to the City Council approval of a 15% inclusionary zoning amendment to the Cambridge Zoning Ordinance. This Ordinance affects all residential projects of 10 units or more. The City Council adopted this provision to the Zoning Ordinance in March 1998.*
  2. The Study Committee believes that the housing developments proposed in Cambridgeport should reflect the neighborhood in terms of the current tenure, e.g. homeowners and renters. This mix should be required in new developments so that it reflects the current diversity of the surrounding Cambridgeport neighborhood.
  3. The city should use its municipal bond authority to raise a large capital pool for the develop-
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ment of low and moderate-income residential housing in Cambridgeport. The city should also develop better relationships with private lending organizations in order to help provide financing for new housing in Cambridge.

4. The city should continue to invest in the non-profit housing development organizations that provide affordable housing in Cambridge because they have been very effective in leveraging the money given to them by the city and other sources.
5. New developments in Cambridgeport should complement the existing neighborhood character and this should be ensured with a comprehensive design review process that involves the community. Among other things, this process could help ensure that projects “fit in” and maintain the current mix of buildings constructed in the neighborhood.
6. Encourage the rehabilitation of old buildings where possible to help preserve the neighborhood character and reduce costs.
7. The Study Committee recommends that the Planning Board require that all residential phases of University Park include an affordable housing component. The Study Committee suggested that each new building reserve at least 25% of the units as affordable to low and moderate income people. *Affordable housing components of University Park are located in Auburn Court Phases I & II and Kennedy Biscuit Lofts. This low/moderate income affordable housing comprises 25% of all residential units planned at University Park.*

#### **Land Use and Zoning Recommendations**

1. The study committee recommends that the following parks in Cambridgeport should be zoned as Open Space: Hastings Square, Alberico Park on Allston Street, Lopez Street Tot Lot and Fullerton Park between Peters Street and Sidney Street. This change was not made in the previous citywide rezoning and this omission should be corrected.
2. The Study Committee recommends that the city consider rezoning in an organized way in

order to help support neighborhood clusters of businesses. Areas of concentration:

- Brookline and Putnam
  - Pearl (between William and Lopez Streets)
  - Pearl and Putnam
  - Brookline Street and Sidney Street (lower Cambridgeport)
  - River Street
3. The Study Committee recommends that overlay districts should be proposed along Memorial Drive to ensure that the scale of development along this roadway is of an appropriate size to the nearby residential neighborhoods. In addition, to ensure that neighborhood residents are aware of these projects, the Study Committee proposes that two overlay districts are created and the base Office 3 zone be studied so appropriate changes can be made. These overlay districts would be included in the Large Project Review Process, to ensure that the public would be notified when development over 20,000-sq. ft. is being proposed in the area.
    - a) The River Street Overlay District is described as extending from Memorial Drive to the Central Square Overlay District along River Street.
    - b) The Lower Cambridgeport Overlay District is described as extending from Magazine Street to River Street along Memorial Drive.
    - c) Study the Office 3 zone (along Memorial Drive)

Consider new zoning which would:

- limit the overall heights allowed in the district, as well as limit scale and density;
- permit mixed residential, commercial and office uses; and
- encourage residential uses along the neighborhood edge.

Create an urban design plan to accompany any new zoning which would:

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- place buildings with greater density and massing nearer to the Charles River/Memorial Drive side of the zoning district and away from the neighborhood, thus providing a smooth transition between this district and the abutting residential area;
  - limit heights along the edge of the residential neighborhood to match or complement those of the neighborhood;
  - Provide adequate set backs to reduce shadows and to protect the Charles River bank from inappropriate visual intrusions.
4. The Study Committee recommends that the city incorporate transition zones that recognize the density and height conflicts between the various zones and propose ways to reduce the negative impacts to abutters.
  5. The Study Committee recommends that the Planning Board require that all residential phases of University Park include an affordable housing component. The Study Committee suggested that each new building reserve at least 25% of the units as affordable to low and moderate income people. *Affordable housing components of University Park are located in Auburn Court Phases I & II and Kennedy Biscuit Lofts. This low/moderate income affordable housing comprises 25% of all residential units planned at University Park.*

#### **Urban Design Recommendations**

1. Create a more welcoming entrance to the City of Cambridge on River Street.
2. River Street Bridge improvements - It should match character/ appearance of other bridges, needs to be renovated. It is a generic looking bridge in comparison to other bridges in Cambridge.
3. Strengthen physical and visual links between important nodes, i.e. Central Square and Magazine Beach, 808-812 Memorial Drive and the rest of the residential neighborhood in Cambridgeport, Ft. Washington and the neighborhood - use trees, dedicated paths, lighting, etc.
4. Increase the maintenance of the street trees in Cambridgeport, too many dead trees and trees with broken limbs which go unfixed in the neighborhood.
5. Trees should be planted on the sidewalks and in parks in the neighborhood as replacements for ones that have died. A citywide program to replace trees should be implemented by the city after inventorying the species that are currently growing on our streets and in our parks. *A street tree inventory was completed in 1996. A park tree inventory has not been undertaken to date.*
6. Ensure that lighting throughout the neighborhood balances the need for safety with protection against unnecessary and wasteful light pollution. All street and building lighting should be focused downward not necessary outward or upward. Emphasize pedestrian oriented lighting where feasible.
7. Emphasize transitions between land uses such as residential and commercial and residential and industrial with the use of trees, short hedges and changes in level. Increase the open space requirement through zoning, especially in "transition" areas.

#### **Transportation Recommendations**

1. The Study Committee is supportive of getting various employers and businesses in and around Cambridgeport to sponsor a shuttle that would travel between Central Square, University Park, Polaroid, Osco/Bread and Circus and make some stops into the neighborhood. The shuttle should be for both neighborhood residents and employees working at these sites. This would be similar to the bus run between Kendall "T" stop and Cambridge Galleria Mall. *University Park and Polaroid are currently both running shuttles to Central Square for their on-site employees. Public access to these and other shuttles is being explored through the City's Shuttle Demand Study.*
2. The Study Committee realized that traffic studies completed in relation to proposed development projects could be a tool which the city could use to understand traffic patterns in

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and around particular areas in the city. The Study Committee recommends that traffic mitigation plans be required by the city for all developments that are above a certain threshold. *The City of Cambridge currently has a Parking Transportation Demand Management (PTDM) Ordinance that requires a plan to reduce automobile trips be approved prior to getting a building permit.*

3. The study committee supports the efforts of the Cambridgeport Roadways Advisory Committee and in principle, they also agree that the Waverly Street and Sidney Street connectors are appropriate responses to the anticipated traffic increases associated with the new development in the neighborhood (see Appendix II). Study Committee members did have some concerns with certain proposed design elements and assumptions. Particularly, the Study Committee recommended that the assumption concerning the volume of future traffic coming from Kendall Square should be reexamined as they believed there would be more traffic than is currently predicted.
4. The Study Committee felt that traffic calming projects should both increase the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists and reduce speeds of motor vehicles. Some recommended traffic calming locations/streets in Cambridgeport are identified below.
  - a) Brookline Street - To help reduce speeds the Study Committee would support adding resident permit parking along the western side of Brookline Street where necessary and the use of traffic calming measures at major pedestrian routes (i.e. near parks, senior housing, Auburn Court, other “high children” areas). *This work will be implemented after the Cambridgeport Roadways Project is completed.*
  - b) Allston/Putnam Avenue intersection – Study Committee members believed this to be a particularly difficult intersection due to a wide angle of the intersection and commercial driveway opening into it. The Study Committee recommends that appropriate traffic calming techniques be

utilized to prevent pedestrian/vehicular conflicts and reduce the speed of traffic entering Allston Street.

- c) Cottage/River/Pleasant Street Intersection - This intersection should be redesigned with the pedestrian in mind. The Study Committee recommends that the roadway crossing distance be reduced by increasing the plaza area to create an aesthetically pleasing, safer crosswalk.
  - d) River Street - Crossing this major street can be hazardous due to the speeds of the vehicles traveling on it. The Study Committee recommends that ways to make pedestrian crossings safer be studied. This study should specifically explore using traffic calming techniques on River Street where it intersects Howard, Putnam Avenue and Cottage Street.
  - e) Erie/Waverly Street Intersection - Sightlines at this intersection are poor. The Study Committee recommends that changes be studied to alleviate any potential problems at this intersection. *This intersection is part of the proposed Cambridgeport Roadways Project and has been analyzed as part of that project.*
  - f) Magazine Street - As this street has more of an historic character in the neighborhood, the Study Committee decided to minimize alterations to the streetscape. The Study Committee recommends concentration of the traffic calming measures at the locations where a high volume of pedestrians cross Magazine Street and/or where there are visibility problems. These locations of concern occur at the intersections of Upton Street, Lawrence Street, Corporal McTernan Street and Allston Street.
  - g) Pearl Street - Pedestrian and bicycle safety on Pearl Street was a concern because of the excessive speeds at which vehicles travel from Massachusetts Avenue to Granite Street. Traffic calming measures along Pearl Street should slow the traffic
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entering this “residential” section of the neighborhood.

- h) Granite Street - Given that one of the next traffic calming projects in Cambridgeport would be along Granite Street, the Study Committee suggested that any changes to parking would be reviewed to ensure the safety of the children attending the Morse School located on Granite Street. The Study Committee recommends that traffic calming techniques, such as “bump outs” at the intersections of Granite and Pearl and Rockingham Streets be used to provide safety for the children. *This roadwork was completed in December 1998, during the neighborhood study committee process.*
- i) Pleasant Street/Putnam Avenue Intersection - This intersection can be hazardous for pedestrians crossing Putnam Avenue. The Study Committee recommends that traffic-calming techniques be utilized to slow traffic and allow pedestrians to safely cross Putnam Avenue by increasing visibility. *The design and implementation of safety improvements at this intersection is a condition of the Planning Board permit for Spaulding and Slye’s development.*

#### 5. Traffic Signals

- a) Memorial Drive and Western Avenue - The Study Committee understands that the traffic signal at the intersection of Memorial Drive and Western Avenue causes queuing on both streets during peak rush hours. This queuing will encourage “cut through” traffic onto Blackstone Street, Putnam Avenue and lower Pleasant Street. The Study Committee believes that this should be discouraged through changes to the signalization of this light to allow a longer left hand turn light onto the Western Avenue bridge. This would cause fewer people to use the neighborhood streets as a short cut. *In early 1999, the MDC implemented this signalization change.*

- b) Memorial Drive and Magazine Street - The Study Committee agreed that a traffic light at the intersection of Memorial Drive and Magazine Street might be problematic because of the current roadway configuration and poor sight lines. This issue should be reviewed with the MDC as part of the Charles River Master Plan to determine the most appropriate location for a traffic signal. *Adding traffic signals for pedestrian crossing of Memorial Drive is problematic as it would likely result in greater vehicular traffic into the neighborhood.*
- c) Massachusetts Avenue and River Street - The Study Committee discussed the traffic light at Central Square and made a recommendation to have the city do a study on allowing an exclusive pedestrian crossing of Mass. Avenue. This exclusive crossing would be non-pedestrian actuated. *The signal was reviewed during the redesign of Central Square and designed as it is because a concurrent pedestrian signal significantly reduces the pedestrian wait time.*

#### 6. Truck Traffic

- a) The Study Committee supported the existing nighttime ban on truck traffic on some Cambridgeport streets. They also felt that if there was any noticeable increase of truck traffic on non-banned streets those streets should be reviewed for inclusion in the ban.
- b) The Study Committee agreed that there should be a truck traffic policy for the entire city. *The city is currently participating in a regional truck study seeking recommendations to address the needs of the municipalities, state and truckers. The study is scheduled to be completed in 2001.*

#### 7. Bicycle traffic

- a) Continue to improve bicycle facilities to encourage alternatives to automobiles and improve safety for cyclists.
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- b) Encourage or require all business and institutional uses in the neighborhood to have adequate bicycle parking.
  - c) Improve bicycle corridors across the neighborhood. North/South corridors are adequate and have improvements pending, but east/west circulation alternatives are inadequate thus encourage bicycle travel the wrong way on one-way streets.
8. Parking
- a) Improve snow removal at curb extensions by DPW.
  - b) Enforce prohibitions on placing objects in the street to “reserve” parking on the public way.

#### **Open Space Recommendations**

1. The Study Committee supports the efforts of the Friends of Magazine Beach and encourages the MDC to continue their community process with respect to the redesign of the Magazine Beach facility. *In the fall of 1999, the City and the MDC reached an agreement to renovate the Magazine Beach facility. In this agreement the City has agreed to provide \$1.5 million for renovations and \$100,000 annually for the maintenance and upkeep of this facility. In return, the MDC has agreed to give Cambridge youth athletic teams priority in scheduling of games. Existing events, e.g. Head of the Charles and Boston University graduation ceremonies will continue to be permitted.*
2. In a recent citywide rezoning, most city-owned parks were zoned to preserve open space. Some of the ones that were omitted are in Cambridgeport. The Study Committee recommends that the city submit zoning amendments to zone all parks in Cambridgeport as Open Space. The parks in Cambridgeport which are not zoned as Open Space are as follows: Hastings Square, Alberico Park on Allston Street, Lopez Street Tot Lot and Fulmore Playground between on Peters Street and Sidney Street.
3. The Study Committee recommends that the city pursue the option of expanding the park at 82 Pacific Street to include adjacent parcels. *In late 1998, the city requested that the Trust for Public*

*Land (TPL) explore the option of purchasing parcels abutting this park in hopes of increasing the parkland available to residents in this area. These efforts are still on going. TPL's is a national, non-profit organization whose main goal is to conserve land for both active and passive recreation.*

4. The Study Committee supports the creation of an Open Space Acquisition Trust, to be used to buy land for the sole purpose of creating more open space in Cambridge. *Since this recommendation was first put forward the City Council has agreed to establish an Open Space Acquisition Fund and has put forth \$2 million of city's funds for purchasing land to be used as open space. In addition, the City Manager created a Green Ribbon Open Space Committee, whose primary task is to establish criteria for the purchase of land to be used as public open space. This Committee completed its work in March 2000 and has submitted a report to the City Manager.*
  5. The Study Committee recommends that the city add 4 or 5 picnic tables to Dana Park.
  6. The Study Committee recommends that DPW add bulletin boards to all the parks in Cambridgeport that don't already have them. The bulletin boards should be of a standard size and construction and resemble the one recently placed in Sennott Park in Area Four.
  7. In general, there are some changes that need to be undertaken for all the parks in Cambridgeport. The Study Committee recommends that trash cans be located near entrances/exits to the park and at a minimum should be emptied weekly. In addition, it is also recommended that maintenance be improved, especially ensuring that the water fountains are in working condition. Finally, small bags should be made available for dog owners to help them clean up after their dogs.
  8. Open space is a scarce resource. Imaginative ways need to be utilized to provide both passive and active open space in the neighborhood. The Study Committee recommends that the city explore the idea of utilizing any additional space along sidewalks for the placement of benches and other amenities. Resident spon-
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sorship of these sidewalk amenities could help to ensure that these benches would be used properly by giving local residents a sense of "ownership" in their neighborhood.

9. The Study Committee recommends that the city pursue the idea of requiring developers to link open spaces in urban developments to other open spaces in both the residential portion of Cambridgeport and other urban developments.

***Economic Development Recommendations***

1. Identify ways to maintain the current mix of businesses in the neighborhood. Survey current and potential small business owners regarding their challenges and needs.
  2. Help make business areas in Cambridgeport more attractive and more business friendly:
    - a) Facade improvement; like Cambridge Street and Central Square.
    - b) relaxation of parking limits during business hours
    - c) rotate parking so it is residential use at night and business use in daytime.
  3. Encourage nodes of small commercial use in significant new developments. Developments in these nodes are encouraged to be of a character similar to street corner storefronts in the rest of the neighborhood.
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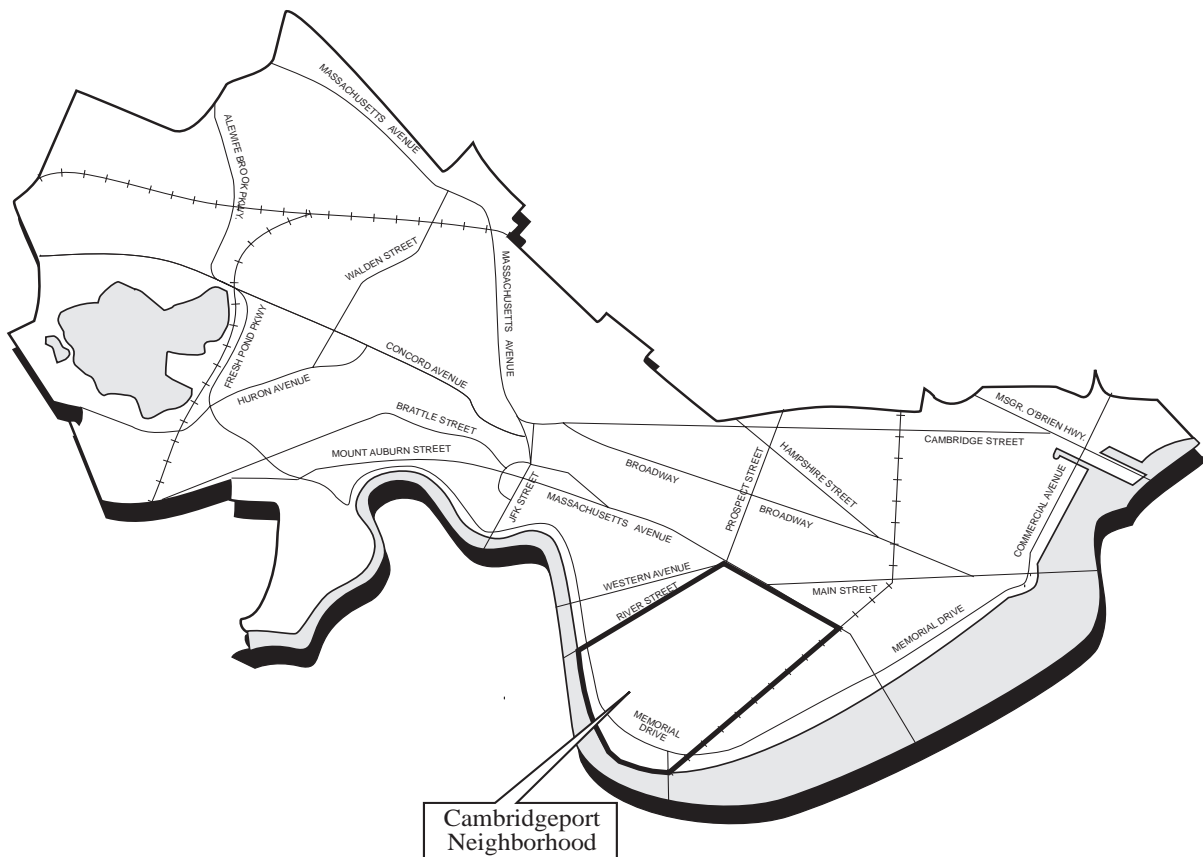
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# I N T R O D U C T I O N

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*City of Cambridge*  
*Cambridgeport Neighborhood Location*



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# *Introduction*

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## **THE NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY PROCESS**

During the 1980s the City of Cambridge, along with the surrounding region, witnessed a wave of commercial growth and economic development. This growth expanded the City's tax base and created new jobs and opportunities for its residents. While many residents welcomed this prosperity, it also brought about an increasing awareness of issues that are of concern to neighborhood residents: increased building density, traffic congestion and parking problems, the rising cost of housing, inadequate open space, and the threat to neighborhood character and quality of life.

Since 1988, the Community Development Department (CDD) through its neighborhood planning program has conducted comprehensive studies in nine of the City's neighborhoods. The object of the neighborhood studies is to identify major planning opportunities through a joint CDD and community committee and to formulate recommendations for their solution. The studies address issues such as traffic and parking, housing affordability and home ownership, neighborhood commercial areas and employment, park maintenance, and rezoning of areas now inappropriately zoned. As part of each neighborhood study, CDD collects data on demographic changes since 1980, as well as changes in housing markets, land use, and development potential in each neighborhood.

For each study, the City Manager appoints a Study Committee of neighborhood residents, small business owners, and civic leaders, along

with staff from the CDD, to review the data, identify problems that exist in the neighborhood, and make recommendations as to how to resolve these problems. The recommendations are presented to the City Council and, where appropriate, are incorporated into the work programs of City departments for implementation, in some cases in the short term, and in other cases over the next several years.

## **CAMBRIDGEPORT NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY**

The Cambridgeport Neighborhood Study Committee met for 24 months from February 1997 to January 1999. During this time the Study Committee heard presentations from city staff and other invited guests, debated issues, held large public forums and made recommendations to better the neighborhood. They discussed the issues of housing, economic development, land use and zoning, urban design, transportation and open space in the neighborhood. The Study Committee discussed their opinions and beliefs and, as a committee, created a set of goals and priorities for their neighborhood.

The Cambridgeport Neighborhood Study process incorporated a series of large neighborhood forums to help facilitate the dialogue between the Study Committee and the community. These forums served two purposes. The primary function was to inform the community as to the direction and intent of the Study Committee and what their preliminary recommendations were going to be. The other function was to get

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feedback from the community as to the appropriateness and validity of the recommendations being put forth by the Study Committee.

There were various neighborhood and citywide events that occurred simultaneously with this study that influenced the Study Committee recommendations. Development pressures, traffic concerns, and open space issues were all points that the Study Committee addressed in the recommendations. University Park, the Polaroid site, Holmes Family Trust site and the Bread and Circus/Osco site were all significant projects that had either been proposed or were under construction during the study process. Density, height and use were all major concerns raised by the Study Committee members with these projects as they all abutted residential land uses.

Although some of the traffic concerns involved the proposed developments in the neighborhood, there was concern that citywide and “cut-through” traffic have also increased as many people use the neighborhood to get to other parts of Cambridge and nearby area routes.

## **THE CITY OF CAMBRIDGE GROWTH POLICY DOCUMENT**

The Neighborhood Study process is an extension of the City’s Growth Policy document, “Towards a Sustainable Cambridge,” which outlines the City’s planning assumptions and policies in the areas of land use, housing, transportation, economic development, open space and urban design. CDD staff drafted this document in 1992 and 1993 after a series of workshops with citizen, business and institutional representatives. It recognizes that the city’s diversity of land uses, densities and population groups should be retained and strengthened. The document also calls for careful development of the city’s evolving industrial districts, such as Alewife and lower Cambridgeport.

While the growth policy document is comprehensive, it does not prescribe land uses or designs for specific sites. Each of the city’s 13 neighborhoods has distinctive needs and resources that can be identified and addressed through neighborhood studies and the city’s planning policies. The Growth Policy Document and neighborhood studies complement each other by informing the community of important issues, recommending a plan of action to address the concerns, and utilizing current policies to implement change.

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*During the course of this process the Study Committee members discussed what each of them felt would be the main priority in the neighborhood. The recommendations that they were to make later on in the process were guided by these priorities and goals. The following is a listing of the mission statement, priorities and goals established by the Study Committee during the beginning of the committee process:*

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Study Committee should make recommendations for establishing priorities in the community and promoting community harmony in Cambridgeport.

The Study Committee also wants to make sure that the public has ample opportunity to make comments on critical situations/sites.

## **GOALS/PRIORITIES**

### ***Maintain Diversity***

- maintain diversity with respect to population, building types and land uses

### ***Community Enhancing Measures***

- encourage interaction among residents (e.g. add picnic tables, community bulletin boards, and designate a central place for information about activities in the neighborhood)
- promote multiple physical use of public buildings (i.e. incorporate both daytime and nighttime use)
- strengthen physical links among buildings and neighborhoods (don't let buildings or spaces become isolated islands in the neighborhood)

### ***Safety***

- better determine park and street lighting locations to maximize safety for residents
- improve communication between neighborhood and police

### ***Housing***

- preserve/build housing for low and moderate income people – rental, ownership opportunities
- allow density increases (backyard development) for affordable housing only
- target 50%-80% median income levels
- preserve existing housing where possible
- allow density bonuses when creating low/moderate housing in reusing non residential structures

### ***Maintain/add parks, trees***

- maintain the existing parks
- when open land is available do not assume use as housing by default
- increase tree planting on streets
- reduce asphalt and impervious surfaces

### ***Preservation of existing neighborhood businesses***

- maintain “rough edges” in neighborhood, neighborhood is better with “lived in quality (allow small auto-repair garages, spas, small businesses, etc. to stay in neighborhood)
- encourage “low density” employers

### ***Transportation modifications***

- explore adding on-street parking for commercial establishments
- support incentives for alternatives to cars
- reduce speed of vehicular traffic through neighborhood
- route traffic patterns away from residential areas (Waverly Street connector is a good example)
- increase pedestrian and bicyclist amenities (crosswalks and bike lanes)

### ***Maintain commercial areas/jobs for all income levels***

- increase neighborhood clusters of bakeries, cafés, etc.
- create small BIDs (business improvement districts)
- maintain both “expensive” and “inexpensive” establishments

### ***Change physical appearance to enhance neighborhood***

- improve urban aesthetic; traffic flow; River Street “entrance” to city; connection, by pedestrians, of 808 Memorial Drive to rest of neighborhood (currently it is isolated), beautify River Street bridge
- allow change of use of “industrial” looking buildings
- improve maintenance of streets, parks, etc. – regularize maintenance
- diversify industry

### ***Neighborhood input to city decisions***

- increase input to commercial development in Cambridgeport